

Message Text

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13

ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 DHA-02 INSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

DEAE-00 SY-05 L-03 H-02 INR-07 SSO-00 INRE-00 IO-13

/042 W

----- 033803

O P 160824Z JUL 76

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO USMISSION GENEVA NIACT IMMEDIATE

SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1261

INFO AMEMBASSY RANGOON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI PRIORITY

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NOFORN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - BOAT CASES

REF: A) STATE 174502 B) HONG KONG 8368

1. DURING THE PAST FEW DAYS WE HAVE HAD SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE BRITISH CONCERNING AVA CASE AND ITS LONGER RANGE RAMIFICATIONS. EARLIER WE HAD BEEN MADE AWARE OF THE HK GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE THROUGH ADVANCE INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS ON WHAT BOTH WE AND THEY SAW AS AN INEVITABLE AND CONTINUING PROBLEM: THE FLOW OF ESCAPEES FROM VN WHO WOULD ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ARRIVE IN HONG KONG BY SEA WITH THE INITIAL EXPECTATION OF GOING TO THE US.

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2. THE BRITISH POSITION, SEVERELY SUMMARIZED, IS AS FOLLOWS.

THE WISH TO AVOID:

A) ENCOURAGING FURTHER ATTEMPTS BY ESCAPEES TO COME TO HONG KONG;

B) HAVING HONG KONG SEEN BY SHIP MASTERS AND OTHERS AS A SAFE "DUMPING DROUND" FOR REFUGEES THAT MIGHT BE PICKED UP ON THE HIGH SEAS;

C) CAUSING THE UN AND SUCH COUNTRIES AS THE US TO CONCEIVE OF HONG KONG AS A USEFUL HOLDING CENTER FOR REFUGEES;

D) AN INCENTIVE TO THE FISHERMEN OF HONG KONG TO GET MIXED UP IN A SNAKEBOAT TYPE SMUGGLING OPERATION; AND

E) JEOPARDIZING THEIR IMMIGRATION POLICY WITH THE PRC WHICH HAS AS AN INTEGRAL PART RETURNING TO THE PRC ILLEGALS WHO SEEK TO ESCAPE TO HONG KONG FROM CHINA.

3. IT IS THE LAST WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT IN HONG KONG GOVERNMENT MINDS BECAUSE THEY FORESEE STRONG CRITICISM FROM KMT AND PLAIN CITIZENS IN HONG KONG IF THEY DIFFERENTIATED IN THEIR TREATMENT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AND THE KWANGTUNG CHINESE ILLEGALS. (MY OWN OPINION IS THAT HKG IS EXAGGERATING THIS CONCERN. THERE IS SOME BITTERNESS ON PART OF CHINESE AFFECTED BY THE RETURNING OF ILLEGALS BUT MOST CHINESE SAFELY IN THE COLONY WOULD BE VERY CAUTIOUS ABOUT PUBLICLY RAISING THIS KIND OF ISSUE.)

4. HKG THEREFORE IS LOOKING FOR A FORMULA WHICH COULD SUSTAIN IN BOTH PRC AND LOCAL CHINESE MINDS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SITUATION OF THE CHINESE WHO TECHNICALLY ARE VIOLATING THEIR NATIONAL TRAVEL REGULATIONS BY MOVING FROM ONE PART OF CHINA TO ANOTHER WITHOUT PERMISSION AND THE VIETNAMESE WHO ARE FOREIGNERS WHO COME BY SEA. SUCH A FORMULA AS WE EVOLVED IT INFORMALLY WOULD HAVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE UNHCR, AS PART OF A REGIONAL EFFORT, ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY AND PAY FOR THE HOUSING, ETC. OF VIETNAMESE WHO COME HERE. THE UNHCR WOULD MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE PRESENCE IN HONG KONG SIMILAR TO THAT IT HAD LAST YEAR IN CONNECTION WITH THE FOUR THOUSAND CLARA MAERSK REFUGEES BUT THE PROGRAM TO TAKE CARE OF THE REFUGEES WOULD BE ADMINISTERED BY PRIVATE, VOLUNTARY AGENCIES ALREADY ORGANIZED TO DO SO HERE. SUCH VOLAGS AS THE INTERNATIONAL

RESCUE COMMITTEE, CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE ALL QUALIFY TO DO THIS, AS DOES ICEM. REFUGEES, SINCE THEY PRESUMABLY WOULD BE ARRIVING IN RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBERS, WOULD BE KEPT IN HOSTELS RATHER THAN GOVERNMENT-PROVIDED CAMPS. CAMPS HAVE BEEN RULED OUT BY THE BRITISH ON THE THEORY THAT THEY WERE HARD TO ADMINISTER AND WOULD BE DANGLING THE ENTIRE PROBLEM IN FRONT OF THE LOCAL CHINESE. IT WOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE UNHCR WOULD TRY TO GET INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IN MOVING THE REFUGEES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE OUT OF HONG KONG. THIS WOULD EVENTUALLY BE A QUIET, LONG-RANGE PROGRAM WHICH WOULD SYSTEMATIZE TREATMENT OF THE REFUGEES AND WOULD HAVE TO HAVE SOME SAFEGUARDS TO AVOID THE WORRIES OF A THROUGH D PARA 2 ABOVE.

5. AS FAR AS AVA HERSELF IS CONCERNED, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT TWO STEPS ARE INVOLVED, BOTH REQUIRING ACTIONS ELSEWHERE FIRST IS TO GET THE GUB TO ACCEPT SOME FORM OF ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THOSE VIETNAMESE ON BOARD THE SHIP WHO IN THE END CANNOT FIND HOMES ANYWHERE ELSE. WHILE WE ALL REALIZE THAT SUCH AN UNDERTAKING WOULD HAVE NO PRACTICAL EFFECT IN THAT NO ONE REALLY BELIEVES THAT THE BURMESE WOULD WISH TO (OR COULD) LIVE UP TO IT BUT THEORETICALLY STATEMENT BY THE GUB WOULD ALLOW THE BRITISH TO SAY THAT THEY WERE NOT BEING FORCED INTO A PRECEDENT OF ASSUMING SOLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REFUGEES AND WERE NOT TAKING THE VIETNAMESE INDEFINITELY THEMSELVES. THE SECOND STEP WOULD BE TO HAVE THE UNHCR MAKE A GENERAL OFFER ALONG THE LINES SUGGESTED BY PARA 4 BUT ONE SPECIFIC ENOUGH SO THAT LOCAL AGENCIES HERE COULD ACT UPON IT AND OFFER FACILITIES THEMSELVES FOR TAKING CARE OF THE VIETNAMESE.
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6. ONCE THESE TWO STEPS WERE TAKEN, AND OF COURSE THE FIRST IS NOT ABSOLUTELY REQUIRED, WE COULD MOVE IN BEHIND, WORKING WITH THE VOLUNATRY AGENCIES AND DEALING WITH THIS PARTICULAR SHIPLOAD. FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS GROUP THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT AND WE COULD DEVELOP A LONGER RANGE PROGRAM.

7. I REALIZE THAT THE FOREGOING SEEMS TO HAVE THE UNITED STATES VERY MUCH INVOLVED. I ENDORSE COMPLETELY THE DESIRABILITY OF INTERNATIONALIZING THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, FROM A PRACTICAL POINT OF VIEW IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT ALL BOILS DOWN, AS IT SO OFTEN DOES, TO THE BRITISH AND US. THE BRITISH, BECAUSE IF YOU LOOD AROUND SOUTHEAST ASIA TODAY

THERE IS NO OTHER COUNTRY WHICH WOULD ALLOW ITSELF TO
BECOME OPENLY INVOLVED IN THIS KIND OF OPERATION AL-
THOUGH I AM TOLD BY THEM THAT THEY HAVE HEARD SOMEWHERE
THAT THE PHILIPPINES HAVE BEEN QUITE GOOD ABOUT THOSE
VIETNAMESE WHO SAIL THERE. WE ARE INVOLVED BECAUSE WE
HAVE ALREADY TAKEN SO MANY REFUGEES AND HAVE THROUGH OUR
EFFORTS IN THE PAST BUILT UP A HUMANITARIAN REPUTATION
WHICH MUCH AS WE MIGHT HARDHEDEDLY LIKE TO DENY WE
ALWAYS LIVE UP TO IN THE END. WE MIGHT AS WELL PARTICI-
PATE UNGRUDGINGLY EARLY ON.

8. SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

A) PRESS THE UNHCR URGENTLY TO APPROACH THE HKG
WITH OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE IN SUPPORTING THE AVA REFUGEES
IN HK, WORKING THROUGH VOLUNTARY AGENCIES, AND IN
ARRANGING FOR THEIR MOVEMENT ELSEWHERE.

B) IF IT SEEMS EVEN REMOTELY POSSIBLE, EMBASSY
RANGOON URGE ON GUB SOME SORT OF DECLARATION OF RESPON-
SIBILITY HOWEVER AMBIGUOUS WHICH COULD HELP EASE THE
BRITISH A BIT.
CROSS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, MARINE TRANSPORTATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976HONGK08394
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760274-0802
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760751/aaaabssl.tel
Line Count: 192
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ORM
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 174502, 76 HONG KONG 8368
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 JAN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 JAN 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <06 Jan 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - BOAT CASES
TAGS: SREF, HK, XC
To: GENEVA STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006